



CONNECTICUT
ASSOCIATION
of NONPROFITS

...to serve, strengthen
and support Connecticut's
nonprofit community.

11

February 22nd, 2011

Testimony of Jon Clemens, Policy Specialist at Connecticut Association of Nonprofits,
Related to

**H.B. No. 6340 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-STATE
TREATMENT FACILITIES'**

&

**S.B. No. 981 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN CONGREGATE
CARE FACILITIES'**

Representative Urban, Senator Musto, Representative Fawcett, distinguished members of the Select Committee on Children, thank you for your time and attention to the issues before you today. My name is Jon Clemens and I am a Policy Specialist at the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits, the largest trade organization in the state dedicated exclusively to nonprofits. We are a collaborative of more than 500 member organizations, with a Children's Sector representing more than 140 organizations providing child and youth-related services across the full continuum of care.

The first bill I would like to discuss with you today is House Bill Number 6340, 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN IN OUT-OF-STATE TREATMENT FACILITIES.' To begin, I would like to applaud the Committee for taking up a bill that aims to bring Connecticut's kids back to the state. When our youth are served close to home they are better able to maintain their existing relationships, and when transitioning into a lower level of care they benefit from established connections that Connecticut providers have with one another; these linkages aid in supporting stability and success. Additionally, serving Connecticut's kids in Connecticut supports our state economy, creating and maintaining jobs.

The intent of this bill is commendable; however, with that said, we cannot support this bill as it is written. Section 2 of the bill's text raises huge concerns, as it proposes to bring kids back into Connecticut while only offering the development of community-based treatment options. The children currently being served in out-of-state placements are usually those who present with the most acute needs – these children often require intensive, specialized treatment. To propose that they could have their needs met solely in community-based settings is to ignore the individual needs of the children. The reality is that many of those kids currently in care in out-of-state residential facilities may initially need more restrictive levels of care in order to successfully transition into the community. We do not want to set these children up for treatment failure and the compounded trauma of care disruption, nor do we want to introduce decreased safety into our communities. The Connecticut Association of Nonprofits strongly supports that the belief that all children should be in least restrictive level of care appropriate for them, but we cannot lose sight of that key word: "appropriate." Different kids present with different needs, to propose a one-size fits all solution is not realistic, nor is it fair to the children we aim to serve. We propose that the language in Section 2 be changed and expanded to allow for the increased in-state development of both community-based and residential care options. In short, if we are really aiming to better serve kids closer to home then we need to invest in the development of the appropriate services.

The second bill that I would like to discuss with you today is Senate Bill Number 981 'AN ACT CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF YOUNG CHILDREN IN CONGREGATE CARE FACILITIES.' The Connecticut Association of Nonprofits is strongly opposed to this bill, as it seeks to legislate the limitation of treatment options for children. As I stated before, we believe that children should always receive treatment in the least restrictive environment appropriate for them; however, some young children do need more structured support than a foster home or relative placement can provide. Some children experience traumas so grave that they require stabilization before foster care or relative placement can occur. Safe Homes fill this role. They specialize in stabilization; additionally, they assess a child's needs and put in place community supports prior to a child being placed in a more permanent home.

Additionally, Safe Homes provide a setting where siblings can be placed together, reducing the emotional upheaval of out of home placement. If this Senate Bill Number 981 becomes law the result will be an increase in siblings being separated from one another.

Furthermore, barring young children from congregate care will have a negative impact on foster care. The foster care system's capacity of available homes is already stretched thin. Emergency placements, instances where a provider must match a foster family and a child immediately are becoming more and more the norm as placement in Safe Homes and other congregate care settings have been discouraged. As this happens foster care providers are forced to match based upon which homes are available at that moment, rather than on who is necessarily the best match; a problem that is continually compounded as more and more foster parents are utilized as emergency placements. In order for the foster care system to work properly they need available foster parents. Better matches, matches that may be more likely to result in a permanent home, sometimes take some time to set up. Let Safe Homes perform the roles that they were designed for – a short-term emergency placement, focusing on stabilization, assessment, and setting up community wrap services – and you will have a system that better serves Connecticut's kids.

In closing I thank you for your attention to these matters. I invite you to feel free to contact me if I can be of help in answering any questions, or in bringing together a group of providers with whom you could have a dialogue. Thank you.

Jon Clemens
Policy Specialist
Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
90 Brainard Road, Suite 201
Hartford, CT 06114
(860) 525-5080, Ext. 26
JClemens@ctnonprofits.org